



A Fine Kind of Gorgeous

The Columbia River Gorge, Oregon

“It’s a glowing phenomenon Gwen aptly calls ‘golden hour,’” says Steve Oberlin. “Sit on the shore at the end of the day, tired feet elevated; your favorite microbrew on one hand and companion on the other; and watch the sun ignite the air as it settles into the gorge.

“It’s my favorite time at my favorite place.”

Steve and his wife Gwen of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin have reason to be bewitched, besotted and awed: Their favorite time at their favorite place is Columbia River Gorge, the spectacular river canyon that at 80 miles long, up to 4,000 feet deep, cuts through the only sea-level route through the Cascade Mountain Range. With its north walls in Washington, its south in Oregon, the Gorge to Gwen and Steve is a playground, a wonderland, a... “Ooh,” says Steve. “This is a very rich vein to mine!”

Mine, we will. For Gwen and Steve’s fly-in favorite destination offers not just golden hours, but also spectacular sport, exhilarating sights, eclectic dining, grand old accommodations, day trips galore and more, more, more! Or so Steve reports.

He likes to swoop his 1950 B-35 Bonanza into the Ken Jernstedt Airfield (4S2) at Hood River, “arguably the capital of the Columbia Gorge,” and stay at the majestic Columbia

Gorge Hotel (www.columbiagorgehotel.com). Here, with phenomenal views overlooking the Columbia River, “it’s probably harder to avoid windsurfing than to get access to it,” so why not? Indulge in the hotel’s ultra-lavish farm breakfast; you can work off the biscuits, pork chops, apple fritters (and more), says Steve, by joining the “maybe 100 brightly colored sails on the water (and waves that surprise Hawaiians).” Big Winds, Windance and other local outposts will provide gear and/or lessons for this classic Gorge blast.

Or pass. The Oberlins say there is so much other fun to get in, might as well begin. Ski or rock climb Mt. Hood (Steve: “If you dare.”) Whitewater kayak the Deschutes or Klickitat rivers. Salmon fish at Five Mile Rapids. Mountain bike. Book a river tour on a stern-wheeler. Or, suggests Steve, drive the scenic highway and visit Multnomah Falls (second highest in the U.S.), where millennia of Gorge geology is enthralling. “Stop for lunch at the Big River Grill in Stevenson, WA,” he says. “Have the soup of the day.”

Or don’t. There are always the other enchantments, like a wander around the wasteland surrounding Mount St. Helens. “Mind-boggling,” says Steve. “With the tenacious wildflowers trying to retake the

pumice gravel slopes around the timber giants felled by the (nine-hour) 1980 eruption, it’s like the world’s largest Japanese Zen garden.” Hike the cliffside Twin Tunnels trail. Even “chase a little white ball around” at the Indian Creek Golf Course (www.indiancreek.com). “In the mood for something amazing and quirky?” says Steve, who with Gwen always is. “Stop by the International Museum of Carousel Art in Hood River. Amazing!”

And for great eats while there? Here Steve is decisive: “Steaks at the Mesquiteria. Lunch at Horsefeathers. Dessert at Brian’s Pourhouse.” Actually, now there is no cutting him off. “There’s more!” he raves. Outdoor concerts to enjoy, wineries to visit, microbreweries to explore, even the delights of local orchards. “Don’t miss cherry season,” he says.

Whew. That’s a lot to do. Now is it time to put tired feet up and wait for Gwen’s “golden hour”? Hardly. Here’s Steve: “Still got energy?”

There’s more? Of course. At the Columbia River Gorge, there is no end to the fly-in splendors. To quote Steve: “Now this is a national treasure.”

www.fs.fed.us/r6/columbia/forest for info.